



# **Military Culture Competency and Transition Awareness**

**Working with Servicemembers, Veterans &  
Families**

**Virginia Veteran and Family Support**



# Introductions

Why Is This Important?

How many of you served in the U.S. Military?

How many of you are immediate family members of someone who is or did serve in the U.S. Military?

How many of you have worked with a Servicemember, Veteran or family member in the last 90 days?



# Military Culture Competency

This training provides an overview of military culture to include organizational structure, rank, branches of service, core values, and demographics as well as similarities and differences between the Active and Reserve components, National Guard and Military Family awareness.

It also provides awareness of transition and reintegration needs for veterans and members of the National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves and their Families.



# Learning Objectives

- Describe the military organizational structure, rank, branches of service, core values, and demographics
- Identify differences between the Active and Reserve components and National Guard
- Identify characteristics of military transitions from active duty, deployment and reintegration to civilian life and the challenges that arise
- Identify best practices to enhance behavioral health, treatment options and resources for military servicemember veteran family (SMVF) in community settings
- Identify resources for SMVF, caregivers and providers
- Discuss the prevalence and characteristics of suicide among military service members, and veterans according to Federal and State data sources



# Military Active Duty Population

- 1,429,995 active duty members
- More than half of these are 25 years old or younger
- Approx. 54% are married
- Approx. 42% have children

Approx. 7% are single parents

- 7% of active duty are dual military couples
- Approximately 3 million troops have served in support of OIF/OEF/OND





# Federal Veteran Definition

## What is a Veteran?

Title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations defines a veteran as; “a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.”





# Our Veteran Population

- 19,998,799 veterans in the U.S.
- 5.1 million are between ages of 25-50
- 5.2 million are between ages of 50-65
- 9.4% of veterans are women
- 7.2 million Gulf War Veterans



Source: National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

[www.va.gov/vetdata](http://www.va.gov/vetdata)



# Virginia Veterans

Total Veterans	Virginia has approximately 725,000 veterans
Population	Virginia currently has the 8 <sup>th</sup> largest veteran population in the nation, however by 2023, Virginia is projected to be ranked 5th
Young	Virginia ranks 5th in younger veterans (age 17 – 39) 33% of the Virginia veteran population is under the age of 50
Female	Virginia has the largest percentage of women veterans to total veterans, 14% (Nationally, females are 9% of the vet pop)

Source: National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

[www.va.gov/vetdata](http://www.va.gov/vetdata)





## Demographics in the U.S. Military

Deployed around the world, the armed forces are a pillar of U.S. power and influence abroad

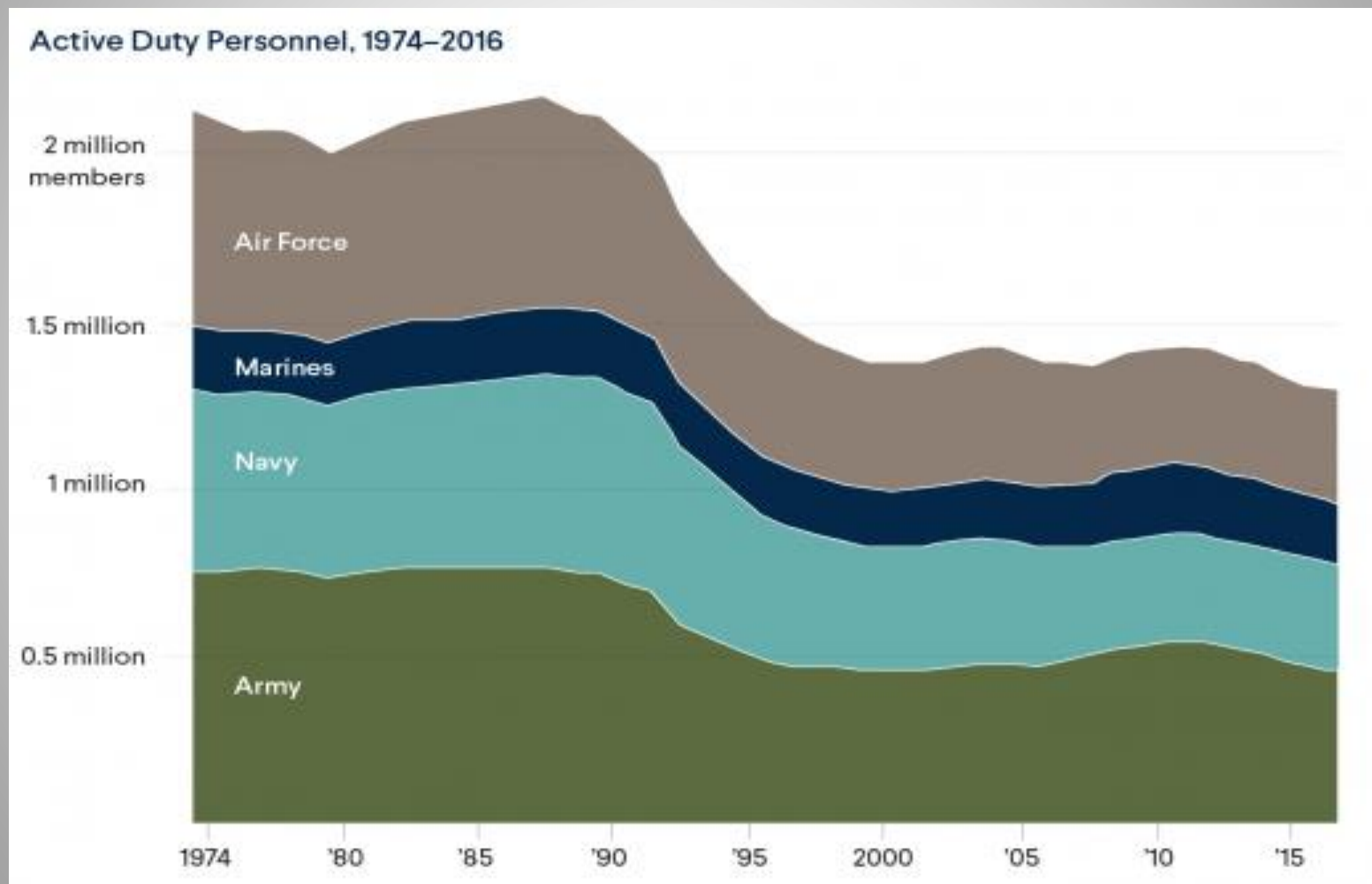
How much does the military resemble U.S. society at large?

1973 - The United States ended the draft for military service, transitioning to the all-volunteer force that exists today

At the time, the active component of the military comprised 2.2 million men and women, that's now under 1.2 million



## *Active Duty Personnel 1974 - 2016*





## 6 Facts About Diversity in the Military

- The Army remains the largest branch of the U.S. military.
- The active-duty force remains largely male-dominated, but women have made inroads in recent decades
- As the country has become more racially and ethnically diverse, so has the U.S. military
- The active-duty military has grown older in the past 40 years.
- Military officers have considerably higher levels of educational attainment, on average, than enlisted personnel and U.S. adults
- There is much more to the U.S. military than the active-duty force



*“The armed forces pride themselves on being leaders in diversity. In addition to providing equality, diversity gives the military more strength by ensuring that it reflects the very same population it’s called to defend.”*

*\*Dr. David S. Chu Former Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness*



# Armed Forces Reserve

Performing duties one weekend per month, plus two weeks of training per year, members of the Reserves and National Guard are considered part-time





# Reserve Components

- 1.5 million in the Reserve Components
- Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard
- Reserve components are subordinated to the Federal government (four are Dept of Defense and one Dept of Homeland Security)





# Individual Ready Reserve

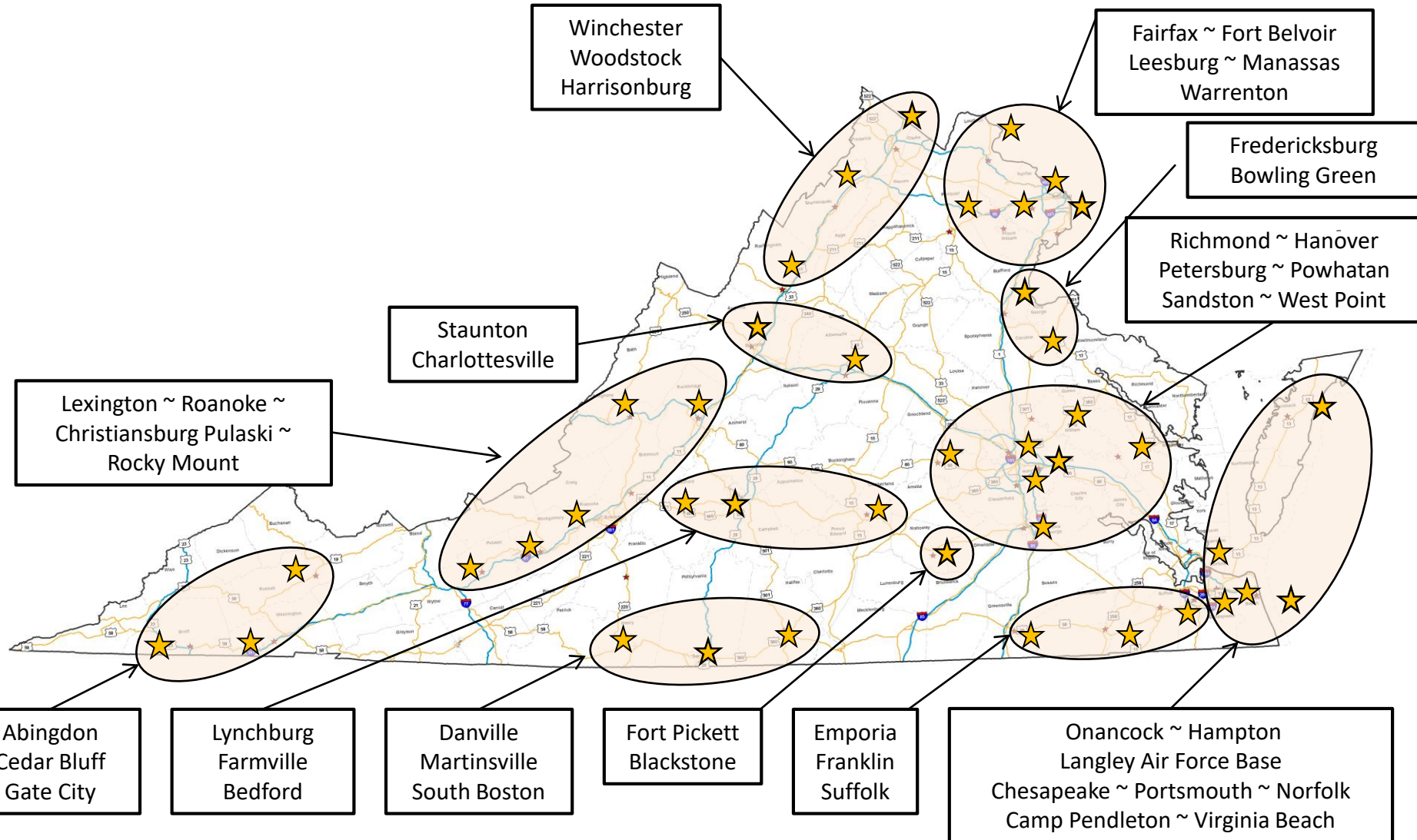
- IRR is a category of the **Ready Reserve** of the Reserve Component of the Armed Forces of the United States.
- Composed of former active duty or **reserve** military personnel
- All members of IRR may be subject to Recall





## Virginia National Guard (Army and Air)

- 9,100 Soldiers, Airmen, Virginia Defense Force personnel and civilian employees
- Unique dual-status force with a federal mission and state mission
- Domestic response capabilities: mission command, high mobility ground transportation, ground and aerial damage assessment, imagery analysis, resupply, medical treatment, decontamination, cyber security and vulnerability assessment
- On the federal side: train Army and Air Force combat and support units, air dominance, weather support, intelligence operations, unmanned aerial vehicles, sustainment support and cyber operations.







# Activation of National Guard

- **Title 10** — President orders National Guard to active duty — can be voluntary or not, total amount of time can not exceed 365 days
- **Title 32** — Ordered by the Governor with the approval of the President — for various purposes including homeland defense, operational activities (airport security, riot control, natural disasters). Funded by the Federal government
- **State Active Duty** - Emergency response, ordered by the Governor







# Military Language

Similar to other cultures, the military (and each subculture within the military) has its own language and terms.

This “language” serves two important purposes:

1. It has a utilitarian function that makes communicating to other service members easier and more efficient
2. It helps to create an identity and sense of belonging for military members (an “us” and “them” so to speak).





## Military Lingo Quiz

**“MOS”** Occupation Specialty

**“Chow”** Food or Meal Time

**“Squared Away”** Taken Care of or Very Professional/Sharp

**“In Theater”** The Middle East

**“Cover”** Military Hat or to protect yourself



# Culture of the Military

- Abides by own set of rules and norms (UCMJ)
- Unique set of traditions – service specific
- Own language/Alphabet
- Organized hierarchy/rank structure
- Defined roles (Occupational Specialties)
- Consistency across units/organizations
- Command and Control Model
- Strong work ethic, accountability, personal responsibility
- Stoic, pride in being able to handle adversity
- Clearly-defined career progression





## Core Values

**USN:** *Honor, Courage, Commitment*

**USMC:** *Honor, Courage, Commitment*

**USAF:** *Service Before Self*

**USCG:** *Honor, Respect, and  
Devotion to Duty*

**USA:** *This We'll Defend*



***Duty, Honor, Country***





# Service Ethos



This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine. It is my life. I must master it as I must master my life. Without me my rifle is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless. I must fire my rifle true. I must shoot straighter than the enemy who is trying to kill me. I must shoot him before he shoots me. I will. My rifle and I know that what counts in war is not the rounds we fire, the noise of our burst, or the smoke we make. We know that it is the hits that count. We will hit.

My rifle is human, even as I am human, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a brother. I will learn its weaknesses, its strengths, its parts, its accessories, its sights and its barrel. I will keep my rifle clean and ready, even as I am clean and ready. We will become part of each other.

Before God I swear this creed. My rifle and I are the defenders of my country. We are the masters of our enemy. We are the saviors of my life.

So be it, until victory is America's and there is no enemy.

## The Soldier's Creed

I am an American Soldier.

I am a Warrior and a member of a team.

I serve the people of the United States and live the Army Values.

**WARRIOR  
ETHOS**

*I will always place the mission first.*

*I will never accept defeat.*

*I will never quit.*

*I will never leave a fallen comrade.*

I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my Warrior tasks and drills.

I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.

I am an expert and I am a professional.

I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.

I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.

**I am an American Soldier.**







## Army - Soldier

- **Mission:** To fight and win our nation's wars with sustained land dominance across full-range of military operations
- **Oldest and largest branch; main ground force**
- Built to execute large-scale and long-term ground operations

[www.army.mil](http://www.army.mil)





## Navy - Sailor

- **Mission:** The mission of the Navy is to maintain, train and equip combat-ready Naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression and maintaining freedom of the seas.
- **Second largest branch, main naval force**
- Provides naval security, ensures sea transport and allow for U.S force projection

[www.navy.mil](http://www.navy.mil)





## Air Force - Airman

- **Mission:** To fly, fight and win—in **air**, space and cyberspace. We are America's Airmen
- **Youngest branch**
- Controls air and space operations and is in charge of two-thirds of our nuclear triad

[www.af.mil](http://www.af.mil)





## Marine Corps - Marine

- **Mission:** Marines are trained, organized and equipped for offensive amphibious employment and as a "force in readiness."
- A rapid deployment amphibious force. (Shorter but more deployments)
- Particularly skilled in counterinsurgency, small unit tactics (Fallujah, 2004-05)

[www.marines.mil](http://www.marines.mil)





## Coast Guard – Coast Guardsman

- **Mission:** A multi-mission force: protection of U.S. coastlines, waterways and territorial seas, defense readiness, search and rescue, port security, aids to navigation, fisheries patrols, drug interdiction/law enforcement
- The oldest continuing seagoing service in the US and the only military service with arrest authority
- Operates under the Department of Homeland Security but can be transferred to the US Navy by the President in times of war

[www.uscg.mil](http://www.uscg.mil)







# Service Force Population



Since Jun 14,  
1775

482,264

Reserve:  
205K

National Guard:  
358K



Since Oct 13,  
1775

328,162

Reserve:  
108K



Since Sep 18,  
1947

310,996

Reserve:  
71K

National Guard:  
106K



Since Nov 10,  
1775

328,162

Reserve:  
108K



Since Aug 4,  
1790

39,639

Reserve:  
8,100K



# Rank Structure



## Enlisted

“E”

- An enlisted member is one who has joined the military or "enlisted." A minimum of a high school diploma is required. Paygrades E-1 through E-9

## Non-Commissioned Officer

“NCO”

- An NCO is an enlisted member-rank of **officer** through promotion. NCOs serve as the link between enlisted personnel and commissioned officers. They hold responsibility for training troops to execute missions. Training for NCOs includes leadership, management, specific skills, and combat training. Paygrades E-4/E-5 through E-6/E-9

## Warrant

“W” or “CWO”

- A warrant officer is a highly trained specialist. One must be an enlisted member with several years of experience, be recommended by his or her commander, and pass a selection board to become a warrant officer. Paygrades W1 through W5

## Officer

“O”

- A commissioned officer's primary function is to provide management and leadership in his or her area of responsibility. Requires a bachelor's degree and later, as one progresses through the ranks, a master's degree for promotions. Specific commissioning programs exist (e.g., military academies, Officer Candidate Schools, and Reserve Officer Training Corps [ROTC]). Paygrades O-1 through O-10



Military Rank to Civilian Job Translation	
Officer: O5-O7	CEO, COO, Administrator
Officer: O4	Operations Manager, Vice President
Officer: O1-O3	Project Manager, Director, Supervisor
Commander	Program Manager, Senior Director
Enlisted: Warrant Officer	Senior Technician, Technical Advisor
Enlisted: Senior NCO (E7-E9)	Technical Advisor, Division Supervisor
Enlisted: NCO (E5-E6)	Manager, Foreman, Technical Supervisor
Enlisted: (E1-E4)	Assembler, Specialist, Technician
First Sergeant	Group Supervisor
NCOIC	Supervisor, Senior Technician
Platoon Sergeant	First Line Supervisor



# Normal Stressors of Military Life

## Frequent Moves:

For children: changing schools, loss of friends, new routines

For spouses: job change, periods of un/under-employment, search for new doctors, loss of friends



**Separation Due to Deployments:** spouse becomes single parent, children- loss of parent, uncertainty, worry.

**Financial:** inability to sell home, unforeseen moving costs, additional day care costs

**Limited Support System:** separation from extended family, constant loss of friends







## OIF/OEF/OND Conflicts

Operation Iraqi Freedom	Feb. 2003 – Sept. 2010
Operation New Dawn	Sept. 2010 – Dec. 2011
Operation Enduring Freedom	Oct. 2001 – Dec. 2014

- **52,010** U.S. service members wounded in hostile action since the beginning of OIF and over **6,809** service members have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan
- Approx. **600,000** NG and Reservists have deployed since the beginning of U.S. military operations in Iraq





## Characteristics of OIF/OEF/OND and Differences from Past Conflicts

- Heavy dependence on National Guard & Reserve
- Longer deployments with multiple combat deployments and infrequent breaks in between
- High intensity urban warfare
- Chronic threat of IEDs and RPGs
- New advancements in body armor, tactical vehicles
- Fewer fatalities and more wounded survive than ever before ("Invisible Wounds")



# Additional Stressors of Combat

Combat Stress: transitional period before and after combat deployments

For Guard and Reserves: changes in monthly income, employment concerns, unemployment

Serious Injuries: long lasting impact, some leading to medical discharge

Cycle of Deployment: Pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment, re-deployment, post-deployment



# Emotional Cycle of Deployment





# Everyone is changed by war







# Moving from this....









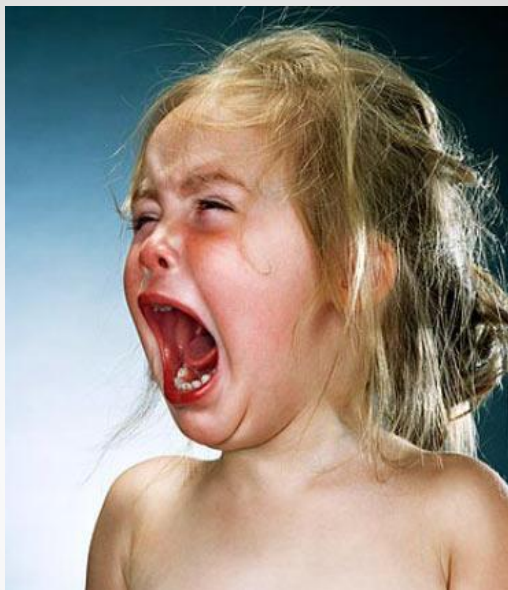








# To This:







- Often more challenging for members of the Guard and Reserves
  - Transition Challenges:
    - family life
    - work/work life
    - daily pace and/or routine
    - environmental factors
    - finances
- 





# Stressors of Separation from Military Life

- Finding a new identity
- Forming a new support group
- Choosing a permanent home
- Healthcare
- Employment
- Residual impact of military lifestyle on veteran and family members





# Struggles in Transitioning Combat Veterans

- Loss of identity/purpose (“I was a soldier”)
- Survivors guilt
- The trauma of killing: moral injury
  - A. “I still don’t know” (if he was an insurgent)
  - B. “Knowing” (Who appeared to be threats were killed)
  - C. Collateral damage
- RISKS OF HELP SEEKING





# The Paradox of Coming Home

*“Honeymoon period”: a few hours to a few weeks.*

Changing combat zone responses to appropriate responses in civilian community.

Reference: Resiliency (previously Battlemind) link for training for mental health providers <https://www.rto.wrair.army.mil/bhr.html>

# VIDEO

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q\\_zX1uhW4Bw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_zX1uhW4Bw)





# Readjustment to Family Life

- Difficulty communicating
  - Unsure what to share about their deployment/or can't share at all
  - Lack of sensitivity toward partner
  - Minimizing partner's stressors and challenges

Irritability and anger

Emotional numbing

Intimate partner violence

Intimacy issues

Role changes

Instant marriages prior to deployment



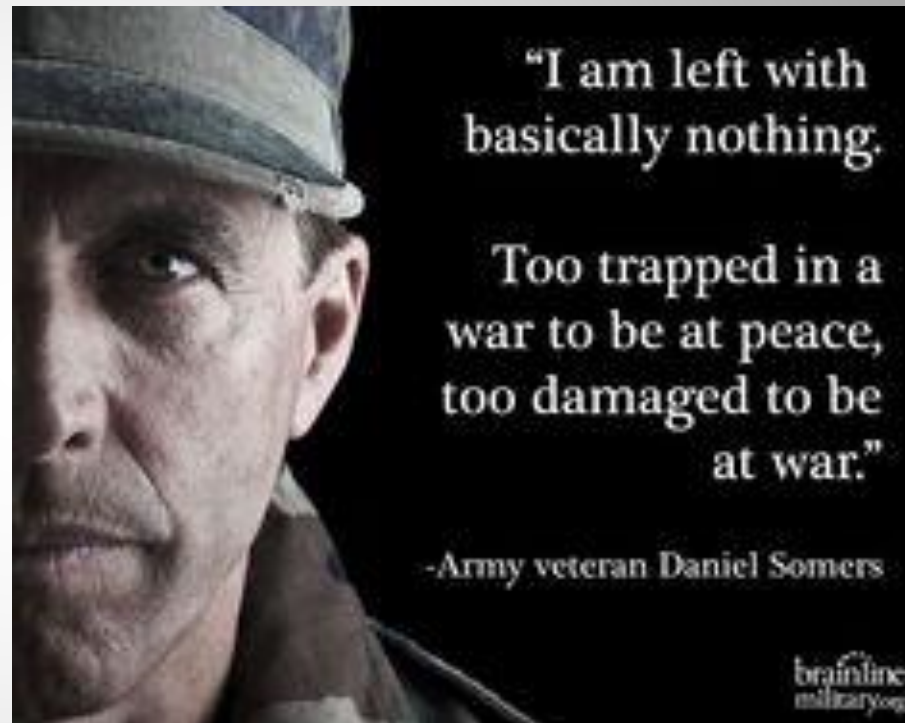
## Common Transition/Adjustment Responses

- Feeling irritable, jumpy or sometimes numb
- Becoming easily annoyed or frustrated
- Feeling disconnected from friends and family
- Experiencing sadness or guilt
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Being uncomfortable with physical or emotional intimacy
- Having intrusive thoughts, flashbacks or nightmares
- Having trouble concentrating or remembering



## Problems which Persist

- PTSD
- TBI
- Anxiety/Depression
- Substance Abuse





## Post Traumatic Stress

- Different from Combat Stress
- Now classified as a “trauma and stressor-related disorder” (DSM V) that occurs after exposure to a traumatic or stressful event





# PTSD

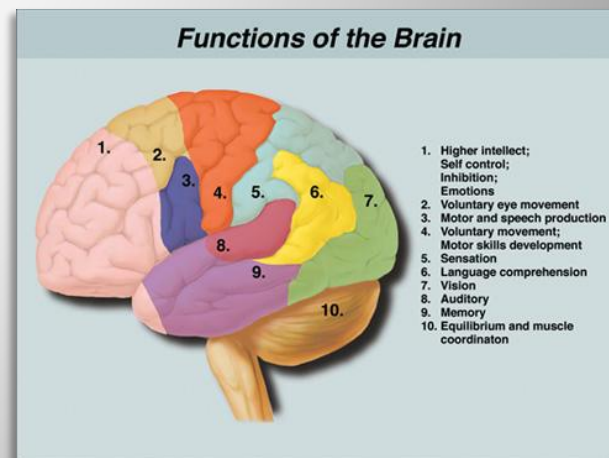
“A Normal Reaction to an  
Abnormal Situation”



# Our Primitive Brain

- Function of the brain: survival
- Fight-Flight-Freeze response
- Stress activates immune and defense systems
- The brain interprets the traumatic experience as dangerous
- The brain generates powerful memories

*Individuals with PTSD sometimes lose the ability to discriminate between past and present experiences or interpret environmental contexts correctly*





## Notable Differences Between Military and most Civilian PTSD

- Trauma reoccurs over months or years (e.g. handling body parts every day, being under fire on a regular basis, repeat deployments)
- Experience is impacted by unit support, command and leadership and national support
- Service members often see themselves as perpetrators



## PTSD by the Numbers

**Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF):** Approximately 11-20 out of every 100 Veterans (or between **11-20%**) who served in OIF or OEF have PTSD in a given year

**Gulf War (Desert Storm):** About 12 out of every 100 Gulf War Veterans (or **12%**) have PTSD in a given year

**Vietnam War:** It is estimated that about 30 out of every 100 (or **30%**) of Vietnam Veterans have had PTSD in their lifetime

\* *From the National Center for PTSD*





# Treatment for PTSD

**Focus on symptom relief:** Sleep patterns and mood, confronting fears, understanding emotional responses to traumatic events

Treatment will reduce distress associated with memories and quell physiological reactions

## Types of treatment include:

- **Prolonged Exposure Therapy**
- **Cognitive Processing Therapy**
- **Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR)**
- **Interpersonal Therapy**
- **Non-traditional therapies**



# Traumatic Brain Injury

**TBI is a blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the function of the brain**

Blast injuries caused by exposure to improvised explosive devices, rocket-propelled grenades, land mines, mortar/artillery shells, Motor vehicle crashes, falls and assaults

Even those who were not obviously wounded in explosions or accidents may have sustained a brain injury

Mild TBI is most prevalent





# Combat Traumatic Brain Injury

- Closed brain injuries – most common
- May not exhibit physical wounds
- Many will not report the incident



# PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury Symptoms

**IMPACT ON COGNITION AND MEMORY**

**IMPACT ON EMOTION**

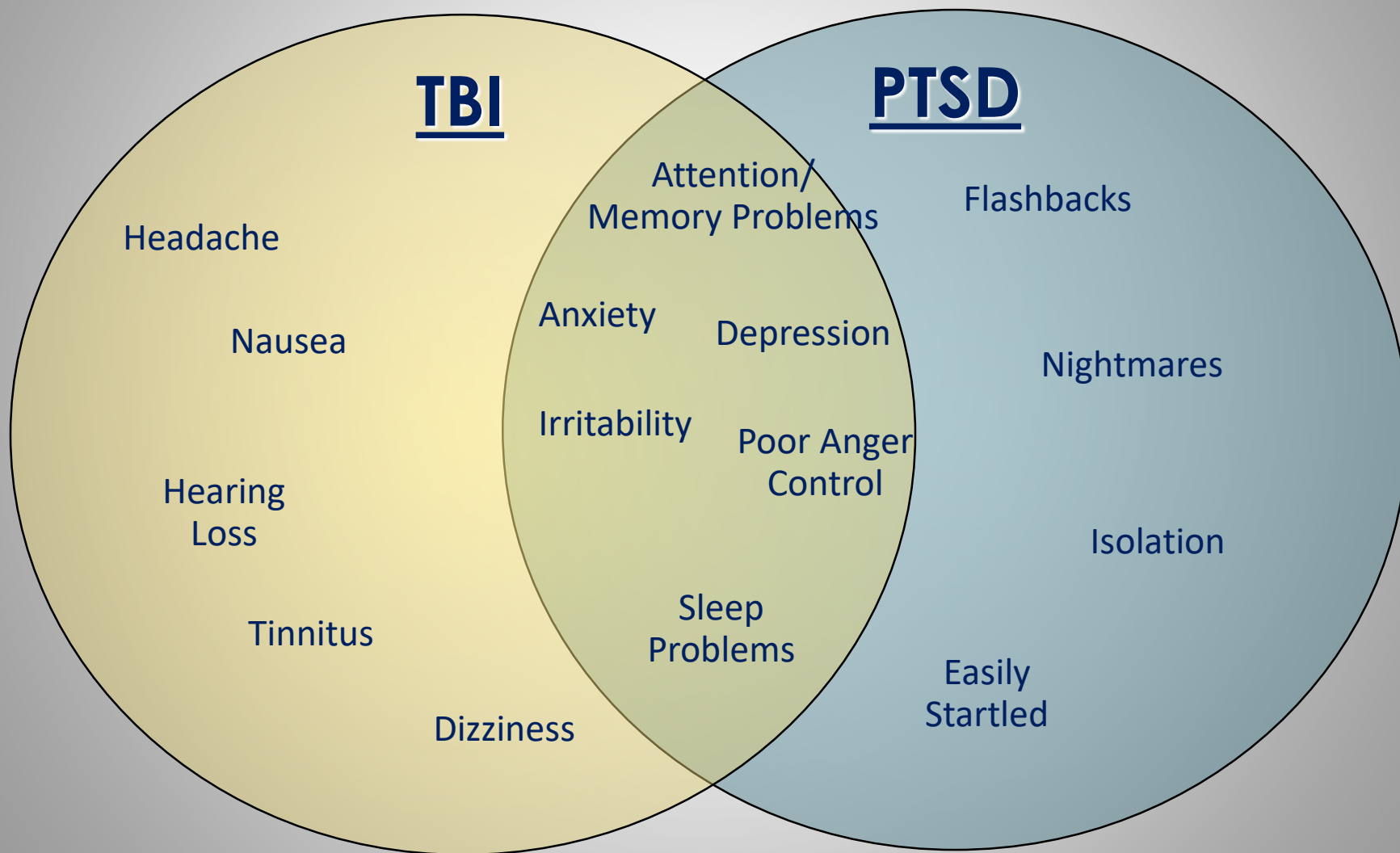
**IMPACT ON BEHAVIOR**







# PTSD/TBI Symptom Overlap





# Common Coping Mechanisms for Veterans with Combat Stress, PTSD and TBI

- Alcohol abuse
- Weapons security or perimeter control at home
- Isolation
- Issues in the home, intimate partner violence
- High adrenaline risk behavior (speeding, etc.)
- Overspending



## Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

- “Sexual assault or repeated, unsolicited, threatening acts of sexual harassment that occurred while a veteran was serving on active duty or active duty for training”
- 1 in 5 female veterans
- 1 in 100 male veterans





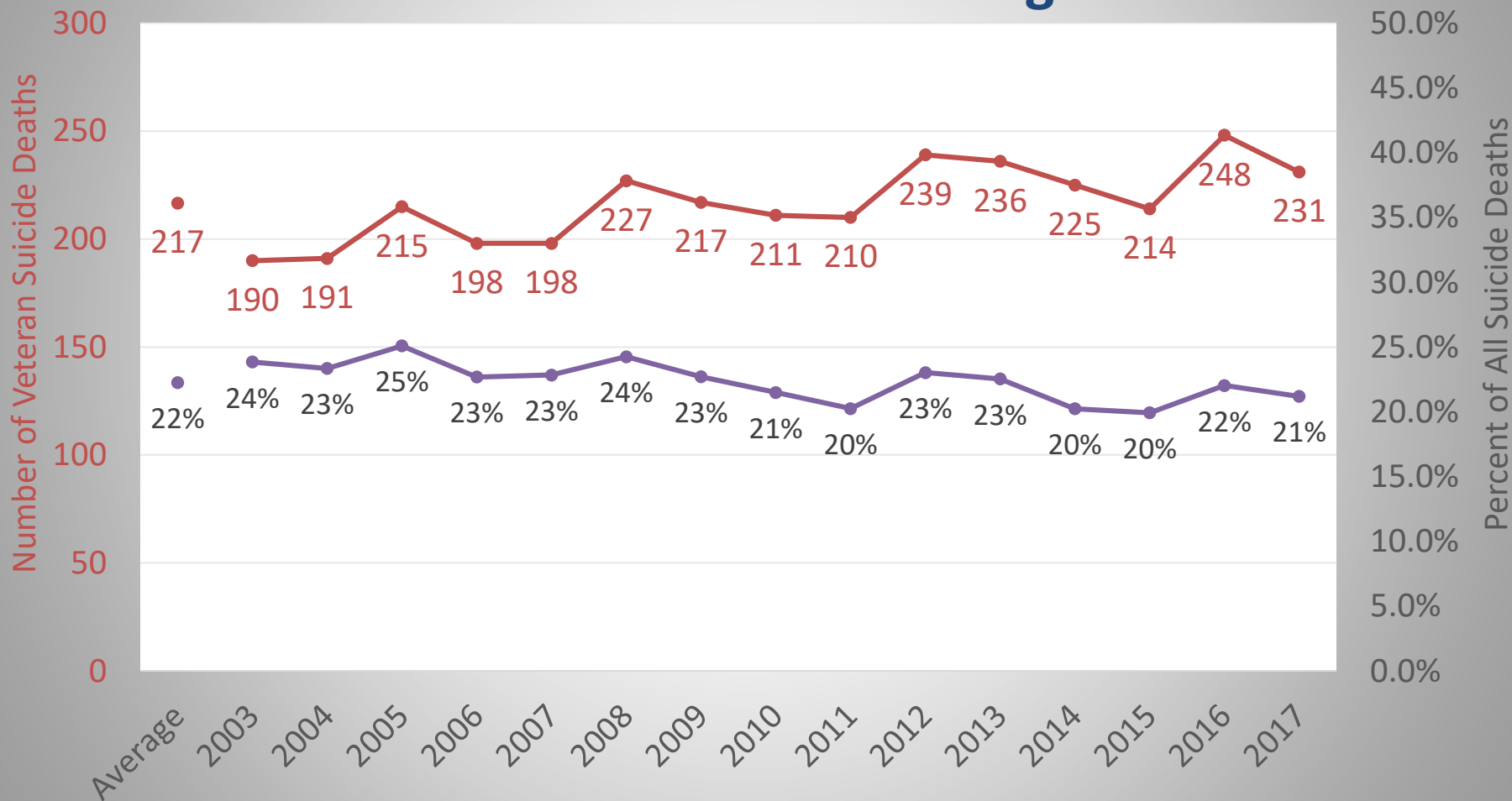
## 2017 Suicide Decedent Highlights

- Highest number and percent of female veterans since VVDRS began collecting data (n=15)
- There were 259 violent deaths of veterans in Virginia. 89% were suicide deaths
- Veteran decedents were 3 times as frequently diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Among veterans with a mental health diagnosis, PTSD was especially elevated for ages 20-24 (37.5%), 25-34 (28%), and 35-44 (18.8%)





# Military Service Member and Veteran Suicide Deaths in Virginia





# Suggestions For Working With Veterans

- Connect the service member with other veterans - help them develop a peer support network
- Be Military Culture Competent
- Differentiating between transition and military operational stress and PTSD and where to refer if needed
- Do not share your personal views on war or politics –ACTIVELY listen to the veterans needs
- Focus on transition and ongoing re-integration – structure may be best
- Consider loss of identity/purpose (“I was a Soldier/Marine”)
- Refer to support services/organizations



## Suggestions For Working With Combat Veterans

- Avoid use of diagnostic labeling early on (i.e. “you may have PTSD”)
- Do not say you understand what they have experienced unless you have experienced combat or military yourself
- Involve the veteran’s primary support system
- Long term- recognize importance in discussing grief and survivors guilt and the impact of experiences on the veteran’s spirituality and belief system
- Refer to other professionals as appropriate



# Strengths Resulting From Military Service

1. Leadership
2. Team Work
3. Diversity
4. Flexibility/Adaptability
5. Systematic Planning and Organization
6. Work under pressure/ meet deadlines



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VmUulPab4M>





# Resources

DVS--Virginia Veteran and Family Support [www.dvs.virginia.gov](http://www.dvs.virginia.gov)

National Resource Directory [www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov](http://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov)

Defense Centers of Excellence for

Psychological Health & Traumatic Brain Injury [www.health.mil/dcoe.aspx](http://www.health.mil/dcoe.aspx)

Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center [www.dvbic.org](http://www.dvbic.org)

Department of Veterans Affairs [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

DoD Disabled Veterans [www.dodvets.com](http://www.dodvets.com)

Vocational Rehab/Employment [www.vetsuccess.gov](http://www.vetsuccess.gov)

Center for Deployment Psychology <http://deploymentpsych.org/military-culture-course-modules>

National Center for PTSD [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

VetsPrevail <https://www.vetsprevail.org/>